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Some Notes on Generic Names.

By W. R. GERARD.

AQUILEGIA.—“We read in botanical dictionaries that *Aquilegia* . . . is derived from *aquila*, an ‘eagle,’ because of the fancied likeness of the flower to that bird. . . . However, to be a little critical, though *aquil-* might do very well for ‘eagle,’ the *egia* would puzzle the etymological genius of Cicero himself. There is, however, a good Latin word, *aquilegus*, meaning ‘collecting water’; and Pliny tells us that well-sinkers were called by the Romans *aquileges*—*i. e.*, ‘water collectors’; and who has not noticed the water-collecting habit of the curly leaves of the columbine, when they are covered with silver drops after a shower of spring? Would it not be more respectful to the intelligence of the giver of the name to believe that it was intended in this sense? . . . I do not claim to have made any new discovery about the word *Aquilegia*, my surprise is that any one knowing Latin could ever have given it any other meaning than that which I have given; but, on looking into different books, I find that all but one, which explain the name at all, explain why the plant is ‘very like an eagle,’ even including the lexicon of that admirable scholar, Littré, under *ancolie*, the modern French form of *Aquilegia*. The Penny Cyclopædia alone of books I have consulted explains *Aquilegia* as ‘water-gatherer.’” Rev. C. Wolley Dod, in *Gardeners’ Chronicle*, June 9th, 1883, pp. 719, 720.

In addition to the etymology proposed by Mr. Dod, and to the one universally given in botanical works, there is still another, which would derive the word from Aquileia, or Aquilegia, a Roman city on the confines of Italy, in the vicinity of which the columbine grows in great abundance.

In order to obtain the true meaning of any word it is necessary to first ascertain its earliest recorded form. This, in the case of the one under consideration, is *aquilea*, and is found in the works of Albertus Magnus (13th century). This old author, in speaking of the form that the flower assumes in different plants, says: “Aut enim prætendit obscuram quandam convenientiam cum avis figura, sicut flos oleris qui vocatur *aquilea*, eo quod quatuor aquilas flos ejus figurare videtur;” and, further along: “aliquid autem simile hujus habet flos urticæ mortuæ et violæ, nisi quod alas avis non ita exprimit sicut *aquilea*.” (Parva Naturalia, p. 381.) From this it appears that Albertus regarded the Latin name of the columbine as due to an obscure resemblance of its petals to the *wings* of an eagle—and not of its spurs to the talons of that bird, as explained by some, or to the beak, as suggested by others. He probably had never seen the plant, but

wrote from hearsay. However this may be, the early form of the word which he adduces disposes of the notion that the meaning is 'water-gatherer.'

Caspar Bauhin, probably regarding the first two syllables of *Aquilegia* as due to an original *acui*, from *acus* (cf. *aquifolium*, now the specific name of the European holly, for. *acuiifolium*), says that the name was applied to the plant "ob florum mucrones aduncos." Grassmann (*Deutsche Pflanzennamen*, p. 28), commenting upon this explanation, says that it "is much more applicable to the German [name]." The German popular name of the columbine, *aglei*, is derived by Kluge, in his recent *Etymologisches Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache* (Strassburg, 1884) from Lat. *aquilegia*, and the word is traced back by him, through M. H. Ger. *agleie*, to O. H. Ger. *ageleia*. But, if we examine the history of the Ger. word, we shall find that in O. H. Ger. (period between the 8th to the close of the 11th century) *ageleia* was the name, not of the columbine, but, of a totally different plant—*Dipsacus fullonum*, L. In M. H. Ger. the same name, with its numerous variants, was applied to *Aquilegia vulgaris*, L., and, later still, to *Ranunculus arvensis*, L., and *Ononis spinosa*, L. What is there in common between these so diverse plants that they should have received the same popular name? The etymology of the O. H. Ger. word answers this: *Ageleia* is a derivative from old Ger. *agele*, 'chaff,' 'awn,' 'spike' (cognate with Lat. *aculeus*.) The *Dipsacus* was so called, then, from the aculeate chaff of its heads of fruit, *Aquilegia* from the aculeate spurs of its flowers, *Ranunculus* from its bur-like fruit, and *Ononis* from its spiny leaves.

In DuCange's *Glossarium mediæ et infimæ Latinitatis* we find *aquilea*, 'herba valens ad oculos.' This points to *Dipsacus*, the water contained in the cup-shaped bases of the leaves of which was anciently used as a collyrium. In the Middle Ages *aquileus* (changed from *aquilus*) was an adjective of color meaning 'brown' or 'black'; but *aquilea*, which at first sight would seem to be the feminine form of this adjective, must have had a different origin, and we may assume that it arose through a confusion, by the scribes, of the first two syllables of the Ger. name with *aqua*, 'water.'

There would appear to be no doubt, that *aquilea* (later, *aquilegia*) is a mere corruption of the Ger. word *ageleia*. This is the view of it taken by those who have investigated the Ger. popular names of plants, e. g., E. Meyer, H. Grassmann, and Pritzel and Jessen.

It is worthy of remark that no people seem to have seen in the spurs of the *Aquilegia* a resemblance to the talons or beak of an eagle, and so in no language do we find any popular name for this plant that embodies any such idea.

The five spurred petals with incurved tips were at an early period compared to five doves, the sepals representing the wings; and this suggested the herbalist's Lat. name *columbina* (sc. *herba*) 'dove-like (herb),' whence O. Fr. *columbine*, Eng. *columbine* and Ital. *colombino*. The herbalist's name *aquilina*, used as a substitute for what was regarded as an irregularly formed derivative from *aquila*, gave Ital. *aquilina*, and the translated names, Polish *orlik*, 'aquiline' and

Bohem. *worliceck*, 'aquiline.' The corrupted Ger. name passed into other languages as: Du. *akelei*, Swed. *ackeia*, O. Fr. *anquellie*, Fr. *ancolie*, Walloon *âcolète*, Ital. *achellea*, *acquillegia*, Span. *guileña*, Port. *acquileja*, Gael. *a'cholmsin*. In French the plant has likewise been called *aiglantine* (a dimin. of O. Fr. *aiglant*, from L. Lat. *aculentus*, derivative from *aculeus*; referring, as in Ger., to the aculeate spurs), and, corruptly, *galantine*. The flowers of the columbine have by some been likened to bells; hence Du. *klokkebloem*, 'bell-flower,' Dan. *klokken*, 'bells', Swed. *tysk klockor* 'silent bells' Russ. *kolokoltschiki*, 'bell-flower,' Hung. *harangvirag*, 'bell-flower.' Finally, other popular names are: Fr. *fleur de parfait amour*, 'flower of perfect love,' Ital. *perfetto amore*, 'perfect love,' Port. *amor perfeito dos velhos*, 'old-folks' perfect love.' Polish *rozycyka*, 'little rose,' Fr. *gant de nôtre dame*, 'our lady's glove,' *manteau royal*, 'royal mantle,' *herbe de lion*, 'lion-wort,' and (as an offset to so much poetry) Swed. *torrvärks-gräs*, 'rheumatism-grass.'

SPERGULA.—Said by Prof. Eaton (Manual of Botany) to be from "Lat. *spargo*, 'to scatter,' from the dispersion of its seeds," a statement copied by Prof. Wood, in his Class-Book.* Dr. Gray, in his Manual, has corrected the Latin word to *spargo*. *Spergula*, however, has nothing to do with *spargo*, but is merely a Latinized form, by Dodoens, of the German popular name *spergel*.

Spergula arvensis, L., has for several centuries been cultivated throughout Germany as a forage-plant, and has hence received many popular names, several of which are corruptions of one and the same word. One of these names is *sperg* (found also in the forms *spark*, *sperk*, *spirk*, *spörk*, *spurk*), of which *spergel* is a diminutive. *Sperg* is an abbreviation of *spergis* (*spurgis*, *sporges*), a corruption of M. Lat. *spargus*, for Lat. *asparagus*. The plant was so named from its resemblance to the asparagus in its whorled branches and thread-shaped leaves.

BRUNELLA.—This word is, in botanical works, derived from Ger. *braune* (Gray), *brune* (Wood), *breune* (Darlington; Eaton). As a matter of fact, it is a Latinized form (by Brunfels) of the Ger. popular name *brunelle* a dim. of M. H. Ger. *brun*, 'brown.' The plant was so named in German from the brown color of its calyx after flowering, and this, on the doctrine of signatures, indicated the use of the herb for the cure of quinsy, called in German *braune*, 'brownness,' alluding to the color of the fauces when afflicted with that disease.

TROLLIUS.—An abbreviation of *trollius flos*, a translation (by Conrad Gesner) of the Ger. popular name *trollblumen*. "Trollius flos, ut nostrum vulgus appellat." (Gesner.) The meaning of *troll* in the compound is not very clear. It is usually suggested that it is an old German word signifying 'a globe,' or 'something round'; but there is no old German word having such a sense.

LEPIDIUM.—Gr. *λεπίδιον*, 'little scale,' explained in all botanical works as alluding to the small pods; but the original species, *L. latifolium*, L., was so called from its supposed usefulness in lepra.

CORYDALIS.—From *κορυδαλís* (deriv. fr. *κόρυς*, a 'helmet,

* Due to Linnæus: "*Spergula*, a sparsione seminis." Phil. Bot., Ed. Spreng. p. 255

with a crest'), the Greek name for the crested lark, transferred to *Fumaria bulbosa*, L. (*Corydalis cava*, Schweigg.), from a fancied resemblance of its flower to the crest of that bird. Hence also one of the Ger. names for the same plant, *lerchenhelm*.

ALYSSUM.—"Gr. α, privative, λῦσσα 'rage;' supposed by the ancients to allay anger." (Wood.) "Gr. ἀλύσσω, 'to be mad,' from its being supposed to cure mental maladies." (Eaton.) "Greek name of a plant reputed to check the hiccups, as the etymology [α, privative, and λύζω] denotes." (Gray.) At least two plants were anciently called ἄλυσσον. That of Dioscorides has been identified as *Farselia clypeata*, R. Br., and that of Galen as *Marrubium Alyssum*, L. The plant mentioned by Galen is said by him to have been so called from its being good for the bite of a mad dog, and the same properties are assigned by Dioscorides to the *Marrubium*.

VINCETOXICUM.—The root of *Vincetoxicum officinale*, the plant to which this name was originally applied, was once held in some repute in Germany as an antidote to poison, and was known to materia medica as *Contrayerva Germanorum*. Hence the popular and Lat. names: Eng. *tame-poison*, Fr. *dompte-venin*, Ger. *widergift*, and Lat. *vincetoxicum* (from *vincere* and *toxicum*).

LYTHRUM.—From Gr. λύθρον, 'clotted blood;' not, as usually stated, in all botanical works, from the color of the flowers, but from the original species (*Lythrum Salicaria*, L.) having, on account of his astrigeny, been used to arrest hemorrhages.

Use of Spines in Cactuses.—Our brethren across the water, assuming that thorns are simply for protection in a military sense, are exercising themselves in their serials over the spiny leaves of the holly. When young and vigorous, *i. e.*, in early life, the teeth are very spiny; when the tree is aged and the branches then a distance above the surface of the ground, losing vigor, the spines are weak or absent. Sir John Lubbock and others, following the poet Southey, see in this a beautiful adaptation for protective purposes. When within the reach of animals, spines are borne, when high up where animals cannot reach, spines are unnecessary. Numbers of species of plants have mucronate points to the leafy serrature, which are wanting in maturer years. It is at any rate difficult to imagine why a sharp point should be made especially for protection, and points less sharp for no protective use at all.

I have often reflected on the fact referred to by Dr. Newberry, that our thorniest plants are in much greater proportion in places where animal life is scarce, and the immense police force sustained by the great vegetable community absolutely thrown away. Cactuses and other thorny things I have seen covered with thorns and spines on deserts where the hot air seemed to be bounding up and down like the surging ocean, and where not even a lizard could have dared to show its face. Thorns cannot be, so I have thought, for protection where the climate gives all the protection desired. I am not one who doubts that nature has a purpose in every move she makes, but the main purposes I think we seldom reach, and that we